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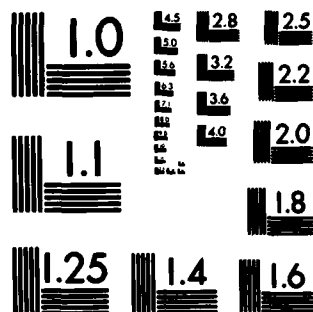
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side possessing the greater number of operationally thinking commanders stands the better chance to emerge as the victor. In order to assess the merit of the thesis, the author first broadens the definition of operational art and then examines the senior operational commander for the Union Army in the campaign at Chancellorsville. General Joe Hooker did not conform his operational objective to the strategic objective. More importantly he did not involve his subordinate commanders in the planning of the campaign or envision them with overall pattern of his operation. As a result his commanders did not seize opportunities on the battlefield that could have meant the difference between success and failure. Hooker's real lesson for the modern operational commander is that all operations cannot be under his personal supervision and that waging war on the map requires envisioning troops he cannot see. At the end of the essay, doctrine writers are cautioned against reserving operational thinking or action to one commander and are urged instead to build a philosophy in which many commanders must perform as operational thinkers.

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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

HOW MANY OPERATIONAL COMMANDERS?----INSIGHTS FROM HISTORY

A Student Individual Essay

by

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ABSTRACT

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Emerging doctrine on the operational art level of war leaves many unanswered questions. One issue concerns the role and number of operational level commanders in a theater of operation. The thesis of this essay is that in order to win on today's battlefield in which U.S. Army forces will undoubtedly be outnumbered, there must be several commanders at echelon's from brigade to field army empowered to act with the freedom and authority of an operational level commander. A second critical insight in the paper is that the side possessing the greater number of operationally thinking commanders stands the better chance to emerge as the victor. In order to assess the merit of the thesis, the author first broadens the definition of operational art and then examines the senior operational commander for the Union Army in the campaign at Chancellorsville. General Joe Hooker did not conform his operational objective to the strategic objective. More importantly he did not involve his subordinate commanders in the planning of the campaign or envision them with overall pattern of his operation. As a result his commanders did not seize opportunities on the battlefield that could have meant the difference between success and failure. Hooker's real lesson for the modern operational commander is that all operations cannot be under his personal supervision and that waging war on the map requires envisioning troops he cannot see. At the end of the essay, doctrine writers are cautioned against reserving operational thinking or action to one commander and are urged instead to build a philosophy in which many commanders must perform as operational thinkers.

HOW MANY OPERATIONAL COMMANDERS?---Insights from History

Background

When the U. S. Army formally introduced "operational art" into its lexicon of doctrinal terminology, it was heralded as the most important change to our doctrinal format in several years. However, many of the officers who either were instrumental in the change or advocated such an addition are dissappointed that there remains insufficient debate or discussion on the subject. ¹ Unfortunately our military thought, as evidence by its treatment in our schools and writings, is troubled by the general lack of understanding and clarity of the real meaning and application of this addition. The critics of the recent past, and there are as many inside the Army as outside, may be correct in part----"the entrenched habit of thinking solely in tactical terms over the past several decades"² has not helped but convinced ourselves that we have created an army of amateurs when it comes to waging war.

This condemnation of our operational thought was reinforced by a large number of dedicated civilian and uniformed historians working for the Army who after a dry spell of influence have at long last been called upon to play a significant role in an Army trying to justify the reasons for change in a highly complex world. This restructuring of our doctrine, including the deserved emergence of military history, is, in part, a 'back-lash' reaction to the reforms in doctrine begun over 10 years ago when the Army was unjustifiably accused of modeling itself after the Israeli Army and of drawing conclusions on quantifiable outcomes of simulations. A product of this era--the 'Active Defense'---was in retrospect an operational art measure dropped from the doctrine by the senior leadership for one simple reason---they did not understand it or

more importantly were convinced by some outspoken critics that there was insufficient historical support to justify its adoption. Today, much of our leadership continues to be confused by the treatment and debate surrounding the introduction of the term 'operational art' and are embarrassed with the exposure of their relative ignorance on the subject of large unit operations--the primary focus of operational art.

The 'wedging' of the term 'operational art' between strategy and tactics, as illustrated at Figure 1, tends to complicate the problem of comprehension rather than facilitate understanding. Operational art--or thinking as this paper proposes-- is easier understood as the sequencing of tactical activities and events by military formations or forces irrespective of size over extended periods of time to achieve decisive objectives.³ These objectives may or may not be strategic. Tactics on the other hand involves activities and events conducted by relatively smaller formations to achieve objectives limited by resources (time, equipment, supplies, troops) made available to the commander executing a tactical option. In other words, the commander of a battle force (size- unspecified) ordered to attack an opponent over the next ridge operates in a purely tactical dimension when he plans the use of allocated supporting forces, the route of his attack and the composition and alignment of his attacking formations to include the positioning of his reserves.⁴ However he becomes operational the instant that he contemplates doing something not covered by orders such as the exploitation of tactical success. In summary, the operationally thinking commander is one contemplating many alternatives. The tactically thinking leader possesses a narrow set of options and does not feel or have the freedom to exploit opportunities on the battlefield out of context with the specific orders of the operational commander.

As suggested by current doctrine and the first model (figure 1), the corps is viewed as the principal doctrinal focal point for operational level activities. In fact this may be too narrow a focus to promote success on the modern battlefield. The truth of the matter is that virtually every commander from battalion through brigade to division and field army can and probably should be involved in or impact on operational level decisions either in the beginning or during the various phases of the execution. There seems to be another way (figure 2) to conceptualize a more fluid and shared relationship between the three doctrinal levels. If the model is correct, then every commander can be involved in at least two elements of the doctrinal triad. The Corps, Division, and perhaps the brigade can be involved in all three elements.

Clearly operations designed at any level and conducted by commanders from brigade to corps invariably should concern themselves with moving forces into positions of supremacy, their relative combat power, and the effect this movement has on the mind of the opposing commander and his battle forces. Even remotely restricting the echelon(s) at which operational decisions apply will reduce the options and flexibility of all commanders to deal with opportunities to keep all levels of command in balance and synchronized. The successful operational-level commander must create a situation on the battlefield in which things happen favorable to his forces. Whereas the tactical-level commander's decision possess a more immediate nature to make things happen. The operational thinking commander works in the future sensitive to events occurring in the present. He sees the whole- where units are, will be, and visualizes the needs of the total force. The tactical level decision maker concentrates on his own part and those elements having immediate impact on his element whether it be adjacent units or supporting units or the next immediate mission. One allocates resources; the other assembles and uses them. In short, each

type of commander must share a vision in order that each subordinate can execute essential operations in the absence of specific instructions.

While the preceding represent truths about the differences, there continues to be many questions regarding the role of the operational commander(s). Is there really only one operational level in a theater of operation? Does a commander identify himself or is he designated as the operational level commander by a competent authority? Does this action prevent in effect a subordinate from discharging operational level responsibilities? What are the consequences of a subordinate's failure to act operationally? Can a commander be confronted with decisions at all levels-strategic, operational, and tactical? More importantly, if a commander can be faced simultaneously with operational and tactical decisions, how then does he recognize this dilemma and sensitize his decision process to take into account the requirement to work at several levels.

A search of literature does not reveal a consensus regarding those items essential to facilitating operational thinking and tactical thought in the mind of commanders at all echelons. In his classic work Strategy, Liddell Hart comes closest to stating some axioms applicable to the broader role of the subject of operational art. While Hart's use of the term strategy generally encompasses both grand and tactical strategy, it seems that his "strategy" closely approximates the Army's treatment of the term-operational art. He lists adjusting ends to means, keeping the objective always in mind, choosing the course of least expectation, exploiting the line of least resistance, and adopting a line of operation which offers alternatives (today, we refer to branches and sequels). He also includes insuring that the plan and disposition of forces are flexible and adaptable to circumstances, and cautions against throwing strength against the

enemy when he is on guard, and against renewing operations in the same form that has failed before.⁵

Methodology

Now that the theoretical framework and questions have been raised, let us shift our attention briefly to a particular military event to evaluate the notion that more than one commander in a campaign must be capable of operating simultaneously at the operational level. We will also review the consequences when a commander becomes more one than the other, and will inquire into the role of subordinate commanders operating under operational commanders. First it should be noted that our methodology will not follow a chronological treatment of the historical event. The reader is encouraged to read or inquire into the flow of events through other publications and studies. Since the focus of our discussion is not the sequential flow of events rather a more abstract less quantifiable object, the mind of the commander, it follows that our analysis will require us to second guess motives and to look at events through memories or the recall of events by the individuals in question. Written orders are a clear indication of what was to occur. Observation of the execution of those orders bounced against the failure of commanders on the ground to sense and seize opportunities reveal a different light on the subject. Situations have been chosen to illuminate the dynamics of four critical relationship that approximate the division of command in battle espoused by our operational doctrine today. They are the interaction of the strategic commander with the senior operational commander, and that individual with his 'deep battle' commander, a 'main battle' commander, and his major supporting operational commander.

The Battle for Chancellorsville

In the early spring of 1863, two armies, the Army of the Potomac (North) and the Army of Northern Virginia, sat poised for battle. The winter had given each time to refit and repair the damage of an arduous fall campaign. The last battles between these two formations occurred around Fredericksburg. The Union Army was expected to resume the offensive in the spring, but the President of the United States had to find a field commander who could win a battle and defeat the southern leader, General Robert E. Lee. He selected a controversial figure, Major General Joe Hooker, who bragged of his own fighting prowess, his ability to devise perfect battle plans, and his leadership of soldiers. "Fighting Joe", as he accidentally became known in the press, would get but one chance to prove that the President's confidence in himself and his army was not misplaced.

The Chancellorsville campaign provides an enormous amount of material for speculation and evaluation. The military historian, Major John Bigelow, who wrote the seminal study of the campaign, remarked in his introduction that his reason for selecting the campaign was that it "presented a greater variety of military problems and experiences than any other in which an army of the United States has taken part.....there was a rapid succession of critical situations."⁶ For purposes of our discussions, it is not important who won the campaign. The fact that the Union army withdrew on order of the senior commander in the field and not in response to military pressure and with sufficient combat power available does not suggest for a moment that the army was a loser. There was plenty of fight left in both soldiers and many of their senior commanders. Most historians are in agreement that the commanding general of the Union forces was defeated not the Army.⁷ A brief reading about the battle discloses that in reality the commanders on both sides did not take full advantage of their disposition and strengths on several occasions.. However our brief analysis is

targeted on the commanding general of the Union troops-General Joe Hooker. His propensity to talk a good game would be in sharp contrast to his inability to fight large formations. It is through General Hooker's experience that the modern operational level commander can learn ---"that the operations of all the corps (cannot) be under his personal supervision, that is, within his field of vision"⁸ and that waging war on the map requires the envisioning of troops he can not see.⁹ Only a commander comfortable with the dynamics and interrelations of all three levels--strategy, tactics, and operational art--and comfortable with the sharing of that responsibility with subordinates can expect to win a conflict between large formations.

Hooker had command of the union forces only for a short period (4 months) before the campaign began. In that period, he made some necessary changes to improve the Union army overall. Some of the improvements included ridding the army of unsatisfactory generals and reorganizing it along more classical and traditional lines--corps with divisions. Except for the paternalistic counseling and direction from the President, he was virtually the master of his own situation.¹⁰ In that same period, Hooker devised a plan to fix Lee's forces in Fredericksburg by conducting a frontal attack with a credible force of three corps against Lee's positions overlooking the river at Fredericksburg. This action was designed to fix the enemy's attention, to confuse Lee as to the Union army's real intention and thereby allow Hooker time to deploy at least another three corp in a wide flanking movement to the northwest of Fredericksburg around the right of Lee's forces. These three corps and a fourth, closer in and acting as a deception and cover to the larger movement, would ultimately come in behind the main defenders at Fredricksburg. Lee, at last, would be pinched between two formations of approximately the same size and strength. In Hooker's mind, any reasonable and prudent commander would elect not to fight on such potentially unfavorable terms. Unfortunately, his personal objective in this move was to impose

on the enemy a situation in which the choice was to withdraw rather than face the obvious defeat by an enemy coming from two directions. In support of this creative and risky operation, Hooker sent a cavalry corps to clear crossing sites and sweep deep to cut off logistics and destroy enemy units fleeing the envelopment and pinchers movement. By all criteria, it was considered a brilliantly conceived operation. It generally went according to schedule--that is for the first two days of the operation.¹¹

Why could Hooker not make his plan succeed? One reason is that Hooker failed to fully understand the mind of the opposing commander. The first battles occurred much earlier than Hooker or his command had expected and in a manner in which Hooker had not anticipated. Thus surprised, he refused to press the action and ordered the withdrawal of the two lead divisions to safer positions to allow other formations time to close on the area. Hooker was not taking any further action until he had massed enough forces to win the follow-on battles.¹² As it turned out, General Lee, who was not sure exactly what Hooker was up to, received enough information on the second day of the campaign to discern the larger pattern of Hooker's movement. He took immediate action to meet force with force and thus disrupted the timing of Union operations. Lee's surprising and quick response exposed the degree to which Hooker was psychologically vulnerable---a commander's private conviction of the invincibility of his plan. Apparently unsure of himself, Hooker withdrew his units to defensive positions and thus handed the initiative over to the Southern commander. Thus began a series of major battles in which no side really won but which caused the Union commander to ultimately withdraw across the river whence he began the campaign.

In summary Chancellorsville was a miniature campaign that comprised several battles--flanking movements and meeting engagements (although they did not think

of them necessarily in these terms), defensive battles and countermovements, feints and rear guard or deep actions to take the pressure off the defenders, and withdrawals and retirements under pressure. Some historians described it as classically Napoleonic. The mistakes made by Hooker and his subordinates are many. Some of the more often discussed tactical errors are calling a halt to the steady advance of his right wing, unaccountable changeover from the offense to the defense, centralization of execution coupled with a genuine lack of confidence in subordinates, issuance of untimely, confusing, and contradictory orders, failure to secure forces, all around lack of initiative, abdication of responsible leadership, overall failure to understand the scheme of maneuver and the objective, and failure to provide timely supporting actions.¹³ However one assesses the campaign as a whole, virtually every major subordinate commander under Hooker's command had cause to operate at the operational level. If they had been given the latitude to exercise operational initiatives, strategic defeat would have been avoided and operational victory insured.

Correlation of Strategic and Operational Aims

One of the requirements of the operational art commander is the successful correlation of operational missions to strategic aims. Current U.S. Army doctrine proposes that the campaign plan is the principal vehicle for communicating this relationship. Hooker's case presents an interesting situation in regards to this doctrinal imperative and to the development of a campaign. As has already been mentioned, Hooker worked for several months on his plan. Once he had restructured the army's organization and improved the morale of the soldiers, he turned his principal attention to designing a plan to resume the offensive. During these formative months, Hooker in meetings with his generals often expressed "his reliance on their assistance and hearty cooperation."¹⁴ In truth he discussed his intentions

with very few of his subordinates and shared almost nothing of the extensive discussions he had with the President and General Halleck, General in Chief of the Army--the equivalent of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.¹⁵

Early in January of 1863, Hooker received verbal and written instructions from General Halleck that gave him the latitude to choose when and where to strike the enemy. His objective remained the same as Burnside's, Hooker's predecessor, --that is "keeping the enemy occupied until a favorable opportunity to strike a decisive blow"¹⁶ on Lee's army. Hooker designed three major variations of an operation before deciding on a final version. Each was designed to use maneuver to place his army at a tactical advantage over his opponent. Each rendition was influenced and modified following private discussions with the President and General Halleck. However, the process of planning and communicating the full intent and scheme of the plan ignored a fundamental requirement then and today--that is to involve and inform subordinates. A review of the testimony and reports of major subordinate commanders reveals that Hooker gave his next level of commanders only enough information to execute the next part of the operation.¹⁷ Even if Hooker had announced the complete pattern of the operation, there is some doubt that Hooker would have ever disclosed his personal preference---to force Lee to move south and thereby avoid a fight that he perhaps did not want to undertake. In his own mind, a morale victory was as satisfactory an outcome as a physical defeat of the enemy--certainly less risk to his own reputation.

Lincoln, on his last visit to the Army in April 1863, expressed some misgivings about Hooker's understanding of the principal aim of any operation by the Army of the Potomac. On several occasions, Hooker privately boasted to the President that he would have no problem in getting to Richmond. This overconfidence and failure to

understand the decisive objective depressed the President. From all observations, it was clear that Lincoln, the strategic commander, and Hooker, the operational commander, did not agree as to the center of gravity of the South. One saw the destruction of the army as the means of defeat; the other viewed the withdrawal of the enemy as a much needed moral victory for the army. As he left Hooker's field headquarters, Lincoln strongly reminded 'Fighting' Joe that "in the next fight to put in all your men."¹⁸

This strategic disconnect highlights a critical aspect about the concept of campaign planning-- that an adequate campaign plan may satisfy two requirements simultaneously but not one at the expense of the other. The larger objective--the strategic objective whether correct or not, must take precedent over the operational objective and become the central the basis for designing an operation. On the other hand, it makes sense from the standpoint of agility to look for other alternative objectives to supplement the securing of the strategic objective. Hooker's plan as conceived in his own mind, could have satisfied both the president's goal had Lee elected to stand and fight, and his own long range goal of pursuing a divided enemy if Lee had withdrawn. It is safe to conclude that Hooker, more than just disagreeing with the President, had already convinced himself that his plan was unbeatable. As was his character, Hooker looked with disgust upon any peer or superior, even the President, suggesting that his operational objective was anything other than what he wanted it to be. Because Lee would retreat as he expected, Hooker saw little value in considering alternatives. The lesson for the operational commander is obvious---failure to consider a range of responses to a series of battles as envisioned creates a great degree of mental unpreparedness. All operational commanders must be mentally alert to any eventuality.

Role of Subordinate Commanders

A few years after the war, Hooker's deputy commander and commander of II Corps, General Couch, wrote that "the object of the expedition was unknown to his corps commanders until communicating to them after their arrival at a ford by the commanding general in person." ¹⁹ Hooker felt that keeping critical information from his subordinates would enhance the security of his plan. It can also be conjectured that his secrecy would keep him from criticism or second guessing by his subordinates. Unfortunately his failure to fully develop his general plan and the continuing lack of reference to adjacent units in his specific orders to other commanders²⁰ became a pattern all too familiar to his subordinates and ultimately caused the command to second-guess actions or wait and miss opportunities as the battle unfolded.

The "Deep Battle" Commander

The first situation in which the consequences of this operational style occurred concerned the dispatch of the cavalry corps on a deep sweep south of Fredericksburg. General George Stoneman's corps consisted of 2 divisions of cavalry and a 28 piece artillery reserve for a total of 10,000 men. Because Hooker was convinced that Lee would not stand and fight when presented with formations opposing him from two directions, Hooker wanted to position a sizeable force to deal with the withdrawing enemy formations. He intended for the cavalry to sweep deep to "isolate the enemy from his supplies, checking his retreat, and inflicting on him every possible injury."²¹ Once again, Hooker's personal direction to the cavalry commander indicates clearly that the aim of the overall operation was not to destroy the enemy army by direct confrontation but to use other means to effect a psychological and piecemeal defeat of the enemy. The actions of the cavalry leads to the conclusion that Stoneman

understood the same intent. Originally Hooker had planned to dispatch the cavalry several weeks prior to the movement of the main force of three corps in order to be in position. But bad weather caused a late start. Historians quickly point out that this timing--that is the late start by the cavalry-- was a major contributor to the ineffective use of this arm. It is also concluded that Hooker once again is to be blamed for the operational error of failing to get his cavalry in position to support his plan.²²

This failure to position the force is only partly to blame for the ineffectiveness of the cavalry. Stoneman's movement was not significantly opposed until several miles southwest of Fredericksburg. In all of his contacts, he clearly possessed superior numbers. What skirmishes occurred were insignificant in that Lee all but ignored them. When Stoneman headed his command back to the east and positioned his cavalry as directed by General Hooker, the campaign was already several days old. The Union Army was beginning to fall back to the north across the river. After the war, Stoneman reflected on his actions and provide some defense of his actions.

"The six days having now expired, during which we were assured by the commanding general he would certainly communicate with us, and no communication having been received, no retreating enemy having been seen or heard of, and no information as to the condition of things in the vicinity of Fredericksburg, except vague rumors of our defeat and capture,.....I determined to make the best of our way back to the Army of the Potomac."²³

This report provides us a critical insight into Hooker and his style of communicating and purposing his subordinate commanders with the overall pattern of the operation. Because Hooker had not divulged his general scheme to his key subordinates, he was forced to giving orders in person. As in Stoneman's situation it was a monumental task for Hooker to issue timely and effective orders to a force deep behind the enemy positions. One has to ask why Stoneman elected to take no initiative

and to wait for instructions from the senior 'tactical' commander when nothing happened as originally instructed. Stoneman's reluctance to act or for that matter find out the situation confronting his boss is clearly an indictment of his own initiative. But, it is an equal indictment of Hooker's centralized style of commandership. Had Hooker shared with Stoneman the decisive objective of the campaign, one can only speculate that rather than wait for an enemy to fall into the cavalry's positions, Stoneman's cavalry could have moved north to the conflict area. In a correspondence to the Adjutant General of the Army, Hooker apparently gives some indication that he lost track of earlier orders when he writes, "If the enemy did not come to him, he should have gone to the enemy."²⁴ One can only speculate what would have been the outcome had Lee to contend with a 10,000 man cavalry force to the south. Jackson would probably had not been capable of making his famous flank march. Sedgwick could have been supported in his attempted drive to the west. Stoneman had clearly inherited extraordinary operational level responsibility within the first two days of the operation. But Hooker's inability to conceive the 'branches and sequels' of his larger plan and his reluctance to share this insight or vision with a subordinate with potential to influence the larger scheme of operations relegated the cavalry to operational obscurity.

The "Main Battle" Commander

While the cavalry sat comfortably but ineffectively between Richmond and Chancellorsville, General O.O. Howard, commanding the 11th Corps, failed to reorient his corps to a threat to his western flank, the Union right flank, and nearly lost the entire operation for Hooker's command. This incident occurred on the third day since the enveloping corps had begun their move to the west to come in behind Lee. Earlier Lee had not taken the gambit of the push across from Fredericksburg and likewise did

not withdraw from the threat to his rear. Instead, he moved two divisions from Fredericksburg to conduct a meeting engagement with the lead elements of Hooker's right wing. Unsure as to what the size of the counter force was, Hooker ordered his leading formations to break contact and set up defenses along the Orange turnpike and to await the arrival of the bulk of his forces. The union formations faced southeasterly with the center of the defensive line generally astride the crossroads at Chancellorsville. O. O. Howard's XI Corps arrived last in the area and took up the right flank of that defensive line.

Since Lee's most direct line of movement was into the center of the Union lines, he directed Jackson to make a march across the front of the Union positions and to come up on the extreme right flank of the Union main defense line. Because Jackson understood the intent of his maneuver without receiving specific guidance as to what the final execution would entail, Lee was in effect empowering another operational commander. At this stage in the campaign, the number of operational commanders that Hooker would have face jumped to no less than three--Lee, Jackson, and the commander of forces overlooking Fredericksburg.

What by Hooker's design was to be an envelopment of the Army of Potomac would become instead an envelopment of the Union army. Howard, the commander of the "flank in the air" as he called it, received information from the corps to his immediate left that they had discovered a large column (Jackson's three division corps) moving across their front in a westerly direction²⁵ Hooker, given the same information, directed that the corps (Sickles' Third Corps) in visual contact with this southern movement to send units south to develop the situation. For this operation, Hooker also took all of Howard's general infantry reserve (Barlow's division) and gave them to the corps commander (General Sickles) to attach to the tail end of his "spoiling attack"

column (Birney's division) that moved due south of the union center to harrass Jackson's column.²⁶ This centralized direction illustrates the degree to which Hooker moved units of his subordinate commanders without regard to their own particular situation.

Clearly Howard was aware of his vulnerabilities. However in his after action reports, he does not address his failure to respond to the threat. Howard had several options to prevent the disaster of a corps risking a flank attack. He could have moved a force south into the flank of Jackson's column to disrupt his timing and movement. A safer option would have been to extend his flank back to the north. . And lastly, he could have reoriented his force to face to the west with his formations in depth. Hooker claims to have issued a directive to look at positions generally oriented toward the west in the event that the enemy attacks his flank and to hold sufficient reserves. Hooker obviously had forgotten that he had taken Howard's reserve from him, and that the XI Corps was already over extended. Despite Hooker's claims that such an order was delivered to Howard, Howard testified he did not received it.

Upon reflection, several things occurred to Howard that may explain his reluctance to act either on his own or to respond in some way to the confusing orders of his commander. First, it cannot be overlooked that the Army of the Potomac had transitioned from the offense to the defensive. Even though it is overally optimistic to expect Hooker to be sensitive to this major shift in the immediate operational intent, there is no evidence that Hooker has issued a full or complete restatement of either the objective or the pattern of future operations. It is reasonable to suspect that because Howard had received no adequate correction to original orders, he viewed the situation as tentative at best. About the same time that orders were being issued, Hooker was bragging to those around him that this movement to the south of the Union line

was part of a withdrawal of Lee's forces from the area---something Hooker wanted to believe and could well have convinced his subordinates of the same. Secondly Hooker's stripping of reserves and his poorly timed visit to the XI Corps positions, certainly did nothing to heighten Howard's sense of urgency. As the situation reached its critical point with deployment of Jackson's lead division into a line of attack, Howard had to be both confused and distracted. Neither the senior or subordinate was able to visualize what was about to happen and made no real attempt to appraise the situation together. Late that same day, Jackson's 'foot cavalry' rolled the XI Corps flank.

Major Supporting Operation Commander

Shortly after the disaster of the XI Corps, another incident predicated on Hooker's confusing, poorly-timed, and contradictory orders to another subordinate commander provides further insight into the degree of confusion and uncertainty about sequencing of battles to facilitate the successful outcome of an overall campaign. The cavalry corps' southern move to get behind Lee was potentially important. However it was not as important as the activity in and around Fredericksburg both before the operation and throughout the various stages. Hooker, in his own mind, never gave up the idea that keeping southern forces preoccupied with a viable threat around Fredericksburg would contribute to the surprise he had planned to the rear of the main enemy positions.

Initially Hooker had positioned three corps which he referred to as his "left" wing under the command of his VI Corps commander, General Sedgwick. Hooker's first instruction to General Sedgwick on April 28 was extremely clear as to the operational intent of the left wing.

....."your operations for tomorrow are for demonstrations only, to hold, the forces of the enemy while the operations are carried on above, unless the enemy should leave the position, or should weaken himself materially by detachments....."27

This instruction was issued the morning before the move of the three corps to flank Lee's position. For two days the enemy observed the union army poised south of Fredericksburg. Meanwhile, Hooker began either to take council of his own fears as some accused him or he became convinced that his demonstrations by the left wing had worked sufficiently and began to prematurely pull formations from the left wing to join his already superior in number corps in the right wing. These actions began in earnest less than 36 hours after the operation began---scarcely time enough to have any operational impact. In response and on the evening of the second day, Lee began to reposition his forces for the threat presented by the now detected movement of at least three corps to his rear. Included in this repositioning was the movement of Jackson's corps to attack the right flank of the union line.

The moves and counter - moves of the two sides were beginning to play tricks with Hooker's mind. In little over twenty-four hours, he issued several orders to General Sedgwick that would confuse the best of subordinate generals.

At 11:30 a. m. on May 1 "to threaten an attack in full force at 1 o'clock and to continue in that attitude until further orders. Let the demonstrations be as severe as can be, but not an attack."28

At 9:30 a. m. on May 2 ... "to attack the enemy on his front if an opportunity presents itself with a reasonable expectation of success"29

At 4:10 p. m. on May 2 ... "You will cross the river as soon as indications will permit, capture Fredericksburg with everything in it, and vigorously pursue the enemy. We know that the enemy is fleeing, trying to save his trains. Two of Sickles divisions are among them."30

At 7:05 p.m. on May 2 ... "direct you to pursue the enemy on the Bowling Green Road."31

At 9:00 p.m. on May 2 ... "directs...cross the Rappahannock at Fredericksburg on receipt of this order (which was at 11:00 p.m.), and at once take up a line of march.....until you connect with us and....attack and destroy any force he may fall in with on the road."32

Once again, Hooker initially "erred in consigning Sedgwick to inaction."33 While it is not clear whether Sedgwick may have observed a withdrawal of forces to his front, the aggressive movement of his own forces to the other side of the river and in the direction of the enemy would have had two effects. On the one hand, it would have held the southern army in place a little longer and thus allowed Hooker time that he desperately needed to think through the coordination of any efforts to resume the offensive against an enemy that was not about to leave the battlefield--a more decisive action and one he had probably not fully contemplated in his own mind. Secondly, the left wing would have positioned its forces in better position to react to the situation as developed by the right wing. As it so happened, Sedgwick failed by having his forces out of position to react timely to any eventuality. Where is the blame for this lack of anticipation to be laid? Once again, reading between the lines, one gets a sense of the mental straight-jacket Hooker's instructions and style had put the subordinate commanders in. It is clear that Hooker was not only confused by what was transpiring to his front, but he had forgotten what orders had been issued to his left wing and had lost the perspective of just how long it takes relatively large size formations to react when they do not have a clear understanding of how their actions can contribute to the overall operation. One can only speculate that had Hooker shared with Sedgwick the real intention and the mutual impact of the related schemes of maneuver, then he might have reasonable expectations of a foreseeable outcome. Showing trust in Sedgwick to act in the spirit of those intentions, would have freed Hooker to deal with the really important conditions developing to his front---the central battle.

Sedgwick himself had enough presence of mind to sort through the confusion of orders to avoid any hasty, ill-conceived, and premature attack. Because his earlier scheme of flanking the positions along the hill overlooking the Fredericksburg plain had not succeeded, he reasoned that a deliberate hasty attack direct on and without stopping to reload would carry the positions.³⁴ It did and with that action Sedgwick's VI Corps was south of the river. The confederates began a hasty withdrawal. Sedgwick's tactics resulted in fewer casualties than previous attempts. Sedgwick, in spite of urges from an apparently distraught Hooker, used what time he could to pull his small command of three divisions together before moving onto Chancellorsville.³⁵

A worse fate was to occur to Sedgwick than to receive a rush of confusing orders. He understood his mission was to drive toward Chancellorsville as quick as possible to take the pressure off the right wing under Hooker. In truth Hooker was not under any real pressure. The right wing had the upper hand in spite of the poor performance of Howard's 11th Corps. The Union army still outnumbered the forces under Lee. This was accomplished by Hooker weakening the left wing, Sedgwick's, by moving two-thirds of his combat power before he began to cross the river. Some of the generals who fought under Hooker and with Sedgwick suggest strongly that Sedgwick understood his mission to move to Chancellorsville was principally one of link-up and relief of the Union line. Others suggest that Sedgwick's role was to be part of a combined operation in which Lee's army would be sandwiched between two converging and attacking formations. General Couch, commander of a corps in the line of the right wing, wrote that Sedgwick had every right to expect that Hooker and the right wing would do its part.³⁶ Hooker, before the congressional committee investigating the conduct of the war, testified that "while he (Sedgwick) attacked Lee's rear, I (Hooker) would attack him (Lee) in front, and compel him to move off toward Gordonsville."³⁷

There are two insights out of the events surrounding the role of General Sedgwick's VI Corps. They are both concerned with the notion of either the number of operational commanders or the aspect of empowering subordinate commanders with operational insight such that they can act for limited periods of time with the full authority of the senior operational commander. Any student of history must question Hooker's motive for pressing Sedgwick to move with haste toward Chancellorsville. In the end, General Couch accused Hooker of a degree of moral cowardice by withdrawing the whole right wing to a place it could be defended. In reality Hooker privately decided to leave Sedgwick to fend for himself.³⁸ This conclusion is based on the deduction that Hooker knew that there was only one corps (3 divisions) not in his right wing defensive alignment. Likewise, he issued a foolish order for a smaller force (Sedgwick's corps) to fight for its own existence and to move to contact him through territory under control of the enemy army. Hooker's inaction opened the door for Lee to turn his attention and his forces toward Sedgwick's corps. Sedgwick realizing that the tactics of his superior had caused his command to be surrounded and to conduct an impossible operation, halted his movement and reoriented his forces toward the south with his back to the river.

The Army of the Potomac was now permanently divided into two defensive positions. Later when Hooker sent a message to Sedgwick not to attack because he was too far away to direct and could not support,³⁹ he at last was admitting to himself that he had lost control of the battle and could not visualize an opportunity to reverse the trend. It was simply a matter of time before the Army of the Potomac called off its campaign and retreated to the north side of the river. In fact of the matter, Hooker departed the scene in the typical fashion to which he informed and let his subordinates act---he left without telling anyone and moved himself to the north side of the river and out of

harms way.⁴⁰ Almost by accident, one of the corps commanders discovered there was no commander and took command of future operations.

Relevant Insights from the Campaign

In the four situations involving Hooker and his strategic-level commander and his immediate subordinate commanders, there appears to be some striking similiarity. As the operational-level commander he never fully shared with either group the true intention or the larger pattern of operation as he envisioned them. He presumed that his ability to assess the situation first hand would afford sufficient opportunity to issue the next set of orders to execute his plan. It may have been a personal attempt to exonerate himself of full responsibility of his failure to take initiatives presented on the battlefield when he stated to his subordinates at the close of the campaign that " his instructions compelled him to cover Washington, not to jeopardize the army "⁴¹

On the other hand Hooker may have been fully optimistic and obviously dissappointed that his subordinates did not adjust their actions to the situation at hand Stoneman"s cavalry never moved toward the enemy force. Howard never anticipated or adjusted his defense to the threat to his flank. Correctly, Sedgwick viewed survivability of his force more important that marching piecemeal and carelessly toward Hooker's superior force. The pattern of Hooker's orders suggests that both he and his commanders never had the real objective in mind, that except for the initial move to open the campaign all other actions became reactive from their perspective but predictable by the other side, that there was no exploitation of weaknesses, and that while the union formations were at various times deposed to inflict heavy damage on the enemy, there were no alternatives communicated between levels of command.

Long after the war had ended, Hooker still had not comprehended the primary reason for the failure of these three subordinates and others to take what he viewed as appropriate action.

-----"Stoneman..... did not read their (his) orders and determined to carry on operations in conformity with their own views and inclinations."⁴²

-----"Howard had failed properly to obey my instructions to prepare to meet the enemy from the west."⁴³

-----"Sedgwick was dilatory in moving, which gave the enemy time to concentrate and stop him before he had moved over half the distance, and I consequently got no help from him."⁴⁴

These few comments lend credence to the criticism that Hooker viewed his capacity to issue a "right" and "timely" order sufficient for directing the movements of several large formations. Bigelow, in his exhaustive study, summarized Hooker's problem.

"His errors were largely due to his interfering with his corps commanders, and not allowing them to do what their own judgement dictates.....It is questionable whether on the 1st (of May) his right wing could have beaten Jackson's force, but had he not, against the judgement of his corp's commanders, compelled it to return to Chancellorsville, it would have least taken up and held a better position than the one to which he withdrew it. But Hooker's desire to have his own under his own eye was due not so much to distrust of his corps commanders as to his realization of serious mental defect of his own. He had not the imagination necessary to keep before his mind the changing positions of troops out of his sight. His mental vision was practically limited by his physical vision, and he had apparently no training or faculty for making war on the map."⁴⁵

Even Bigelow's comments--correct as they are-- overlook an aspect that is critical to the understanding of operational level thinking and execution. Bigelow study focuses on a singular individual as the root cause for failure. For the Union way of war was to find a general to beat another general. Neither the national leadership or the generals in the field realized that the Army of Northern Virginia was fought using the

collective intellect of many generals. In the Chancellorsville campaign, Hooker only initially was matching wits with one general--Lee. But as the Southern commander discovered the pattern of the Union movement, he released operational authority to his subordinates--some as low as brigades. Lee's actions were to free himself to deal with the most critical situation without reducing the agility of the total force.

Hooker was to match wits with an ever increasing number of operationally thinking commanders. He never recognized or would admit to this condition. When Lee turned back toward Chancellorsville and left a division to watch the left wing of the Union corps, Hooker was outnumbered mentally 3 to 1. His opponents were, in addition to Lee, the brigade commander at Marys Height overlooking Frederickburg and the Division Commander, General Early, to the south. And when Jackson started his flank march to the west, the odds increased 4 to 1 against Hooker. Sedgwick's movement against several division commanders could do little to compensate for the number of operational minds neutralized by the act of collecting all the remaining corps in defensive positions around Hooker at Chancellorsville. In summary Hooker was never outnumbered physically or materially, but always mentally. He was outnumbered at the outset when he ignored strategic insight and direction and remained so the longer he tried to match his wits with one opponent--Lee.

Earlier in this essay, it was suggested that the current Army doctrine was too narrow in scope to promote operational level thinking or execution on the battlefield. If the observations on the conduct of commanders at Chancellorsville are remotely accurate, then our doctrine needs to be remodeled slightly (see figure 3) to promote operational thinking prior to campaigns and during their prosecution. Two underlying principles gleaned from Hooker's experience must be adopted by the doctrine. First, several

commanders in a theatre must be empowered to function with operational-level authority. Secondly, part of the equation of victory includes identifying the number of opposing commanders who possess operational authority and that campaigns should be designed with an equal or a greater number of operational commanders to oppose them. For certain, many commanders down to at least brigade level should be prepared to wear the mantel of operational-level commander. The essence of Air-Land Battle 2000 doctrine leans in this direction when it suggests that the battlefield of tomorrow is more like a soccer game than a football game. Hooker played football; Lee and his subordinates played soccer.

Unfortunately the doctrinal architects are not going to be convinced unless our influential historians are forced to ask tougher questions than they are asking now. A cursory look at a list of battles suggests there may be several examples to support the concluding thesis that several operational level thinking commanders must be identified for each campaign. On the eastern front of World War II, Hitler, as the operational commander, was confronted by several Soviet army front commanders directing operations at the operational level. The Japanese 25th Army in the Malayan campaign decentralized operations to division and brigade commanders and thus confronted the centralized direction by the British high-command with several unpredictable options. Closer to home, Lee, at Gettysburg, short three of his most trusted operational leaders--Jackson, Stuart, and thought actions similiar to Hooker. Longstreet---- was never up to matching wits with a number of corps commanders. General Mead consulted with his subordinates and allowed them by design or personal initiative, as in the case of Sickles, to make appropriate operation level decisions that kept the balance of power in their favor. Hooker's restricted control of the battle invited defeat for his army. There are many more examples. Why is this relevant today? We are talking about even greater dispersion with fragmented control of large

units. Already outnumbered, the commander on the battlefield must be given the freedom to take action that will in his mind contribute to the overall outcome of the campaign. The question must continue to be explored. The larger the number of operational-level thinking commanders on the battlefield, the better the chance for victory.

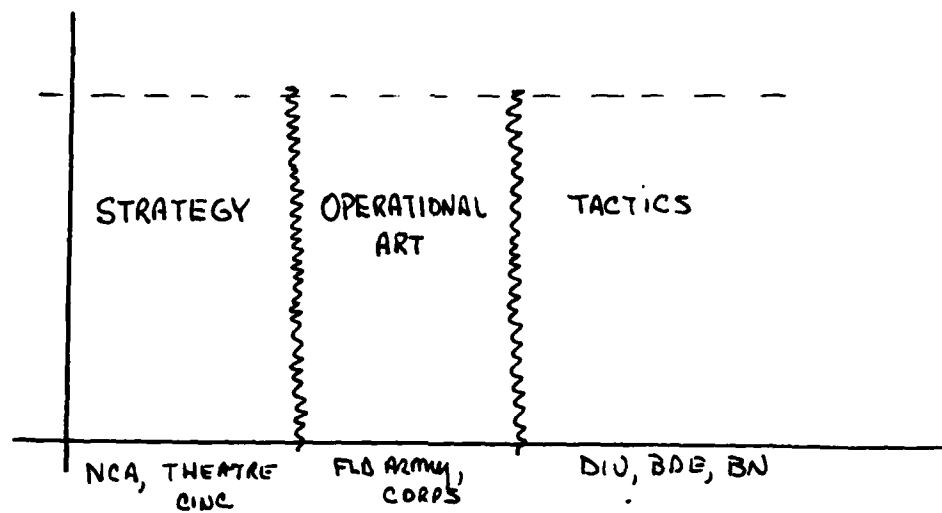


Figure 1. Current doctrinal model

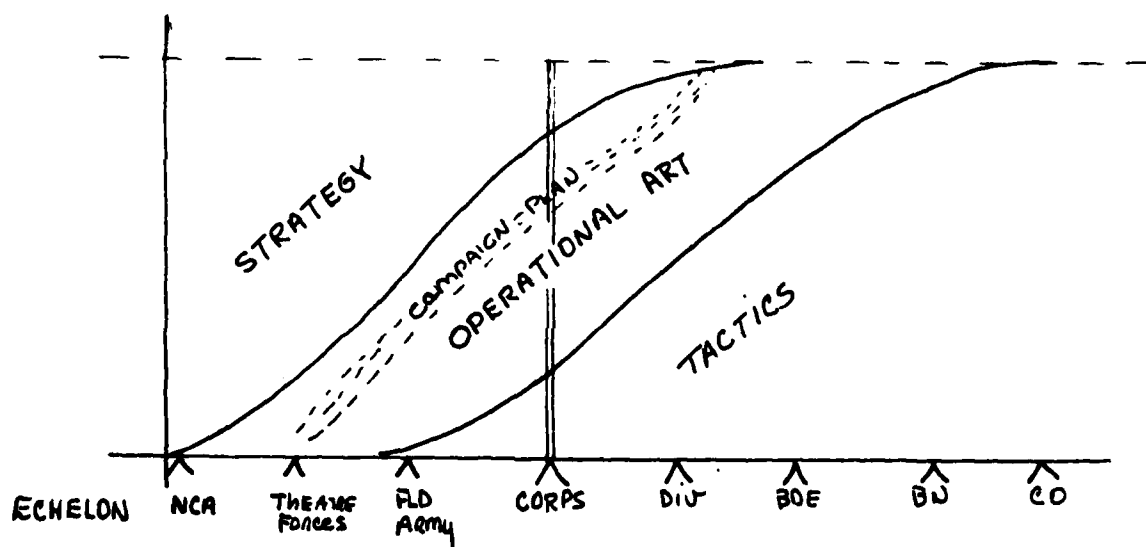


Figure 2. Model of doctrinal reality

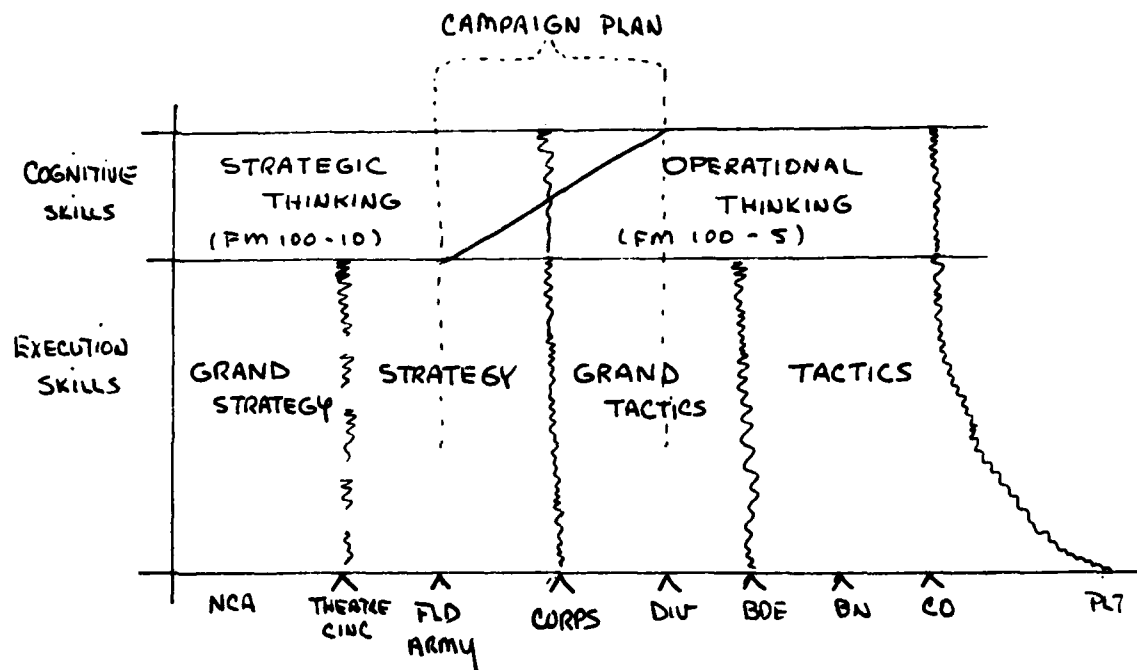


Figure 3. Proposed model for integration of doctrinal levels of thinking and execution.

ENDNOTES

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 - b. Major General D. N. Couch, "The Chancellorsville Campaign" in Vol. III of Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, The Century Co., New York, pages 154-171.
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12. Samuel P. Bates, "Hooker's Comments on Chancellorsville" in Vol III, Battles and Leaders, pages 215-223.
13. Edward J. Stackpole, Chancellorsville, Lee's Greatest Battle, The Stackpole Company, Harrisburg, Pa 1958, pages 359-372.
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17. Couch, in Battles and Leaders, page 156.
18. Couch, page 155. Note that General Couch was present at that final meeting at which Hooker received the charge directly from the President.
19. Couch, page 156.
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23. Ibid, page 153.
24. Bigelow, page 458.
25. Major General O. O. Howard, "The Eleventh Corps at Chancellorsville" in Vol III, Battles and Leaders, page 192.
26. Ibid, page 197.
27. Bigelow, page 191.
28. Ibid, page 244.
29. Stackpole, page 314.
30. Bigelow, page 333.
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37. Testimony by Major General J. Hooker as reported in the Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, Government Printing Office, Wash., D.C. 1865, page 148.
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- 41. Ibid, page 171.
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- 44. Ibid, page 222.
- 45. Bigelow, pages 431-432.

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